

## **WSJM November 30, 2005 Pruning Basics**

This is Al Gaus the Berrien County Extension Educator for fruit and ornamentals reporting from the MSU Extension office in Berrien County. Now that we have reached the dormant season, most growers' thoughts turn to the annual management practice of pruning. Especially, with these unusually warm temperatures and lack of snow, growers really want to get started. So, today, I thought I would touch on a few pruning basics to get the season started off right.

The best time to do "heavy" pruning is during the dormant season. In general, the later in the dormant season you can wait and still get finished before bloom, the better. Remove any diseased or broken branches. Also remove spur clusters or old wood that has reached seven years of age. Start by pruning your pear trees first, then apples, grapes and blueberries, then plums and cherries, then the bramble crops, and finish with peaches. When pruning, remember the more light that gets to the center of the plant, the more fruitful the whole plant will be. Forked scaffold branches above 3 feet on any crop severely limit the amount of sunshine that reaches the lower levels of the tree. Your goal should be to grow top quality fruit all throughout the tree not just in the top two feet of the tree. Also, the more flower buds you remove in pruning, the fewer fruit you will have to thin next spring on those crops that require thinning. In fruit trees, remove limbs that have grown larger than one half the size of the branch to which they are attached. If your main scaffold is 4 inches in diameter, then remove branches that are 2 inches in diameter or larger. These big limbs tend to take all the energy away from the remaining tree. Finally, if you are still training young trees, try to remove as little growth as possible by spreading those vertically oriented limbs but remove limbs with narrow angles of attachment.

Within a given fruit, always start with those that mature fruit early, then move to the later maturing fruit. In general, with rootstocks, start with the more standard size trees and finish with the dwarfing ones. That gives you some of the basics of pruning. This has been Al Gaus for MSU Extension in Berrien County.